

News Release

U of M Crookston Marks Eighth Year of Enrollment Growth

By Itollefs on Monday, October 13, 2014Total number of degree-seeking students at 1,876 for fall semester

From official data released at the October meeting of the University of Minnesota Board of Regents, enrollment at the University of Minnesota Crookston for fall semester 2014 is a new campus record of 1,876 undergraduate students. This number exceeds fall 2013's previous all-time record of 1,813 and continues an eight-year trend in enrollment growth. The official number represents all full- and part-time degree-seeking undergraduate students--those attending courses on campus as well as those pursuing their degrees entirely online--at the end of the second week of the semester, as per University policy.

The enrollment figure is notable not only because it is another record-setter, but also because online enrollment is now approximately the same as enrollment on campus. Of the degree-seeking enrollment total, 941 students are attending classes on campus and 935 are classified as "online-only" students, a designation which means their entire course load is taken online.

The Growth of Online Education

Since 2001, when the U of M Crookston granted its first degree to a student who completed a major entirely online, the growth of both online enrollment and online options has been rapid and substantial. Contributing factors have included the demand for high quality online degree programs by students who may already be employed and looking to complete a bachelor's degree in order to advance in their career. The option to complete a degree online affords a level of convenience that meets these students' needs. UMC's typical online student is in his or her 30s, employed, and enrolled part-time with an average of 9 college credits. Many online students also have children.

Another factor has been the University of Minnesota brand name and quality. The U of M Crookston's online classes have earned a number of "best of" and "most affordable" accolades from a wide spectrum of organizations that rank online programs, ranging from U.S.News to OnlineU to the Guide to Online Schools. UMC's practice of having faculty teach both on-campus and online courses as a measure to ensure quality in the curriculum is considered a best practice. UMC also takes part in Quality Matters, a nationally recognized, faculty-centered peer review process that helps certify the quality of online courses and instructional materials. This comes at a time when scrutiny is revealing questionable practices, poor outcomes, and high costs among some for-profit online colleges.

An additional factor to the growth in online enrollment is that the U of M Crookston has continued to add the online option for many of its majors. It currently offers thirteen of its twenty-nine degree programs entirely online as well as on-campus.

"We are very pleased by the continued interest in and growth of our online majors," said Fred Wood, chancellor of the Crookston campus. "As part of our long-term strategic planning, we have set a priority on growing our online enrollment to help meet the changing educational needs of the region and state. I am firmly convinced, as are our faculty and staff, that by offering our programs online as well as on-campus we are fulfilling our long-held commitment as a modern, land-grant university to provide access to educational programs in support of our mission." He added, "This is something we embrace, and we hope and expect continued growth in our online programs."

On-Campus Students Continue as a Priority as Well

Over the past few years, the number of students attending "on site" on the UMC campus has hovered between 900 and 1100, with 941 this year. The number of incoming freshmen is up roughly 60 from last year, an increase that is especially notable in light of flat or declining numbers of high school graduates and dips in new student enrollment being experienced at other Minnesota public colleges and universities. This fall, campus residence halls serve as home for just under 600 students, also up from last year.

Wood said, "In addition to our strides in online education, we maintain our commitment to offering a top-notch, robust on-campus experience for both residential and commuter students. A major focus of our long-term strategic planning is to achieve a strong critical mass of students on our campus because we continue to believe in the power of a face to face educational experience that maintains the practice of experiential learning, critical thinking, and the use of technology."

In addition to those students enrolled in a specific major or taking coursework toward a degree, there are a number of students living on campus who are considered "non-degree" since they are enrolled via an exchange program or other program that will bring them to Crookston for only part of their academic career. For example, the more than 35 new Brazilian students attending UMC this year are enrolled through a one-year exchange program, and several other students enrolled in the English as a Second Language (ESL) program are considered non-degree students because they are taking English courses to prepare for admission into a degree program.

"We definitely have a richly diverse student body in many dimensions," said Wood. "From international students representing more than 20 countries, to students of color from Minnesota and across the country, to students from both rural and urban backgrounds representing more than 40 states, we are bringing students together from around the globe. It's another dimension of growth that enriches the experience of everyone at the U of M Crookston."

The University of Minnesota, Crookston now delivers 29 undergraduate degree programs--thirteen of which are also available entirely online--and enrolls students from more than 20 countries and 40 states. To learn more, visit [www.umcrookston.edu](http://www.umcrookston.edu).

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2900 University Ave., Crookston, MN 56716

800-862-6466 | 218-281-6510 | [umcinfo@umn.edu](mailto:umcinfo@umn.edu)

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